

38) 28307 Private George HALLETT

Dow 25/04/18

1st Bn Hampshire Regiment

Born Aldermaston

Enlisted Slough

Residence Datchet, Bucks

Awarded: British War Medal

Victory Medal

Date arrived in theatre of war: not known

It is not known when George Hallett joined up or proceeded to France, but this must have been after 1st January 1916 and most probably, significantly later than this date.

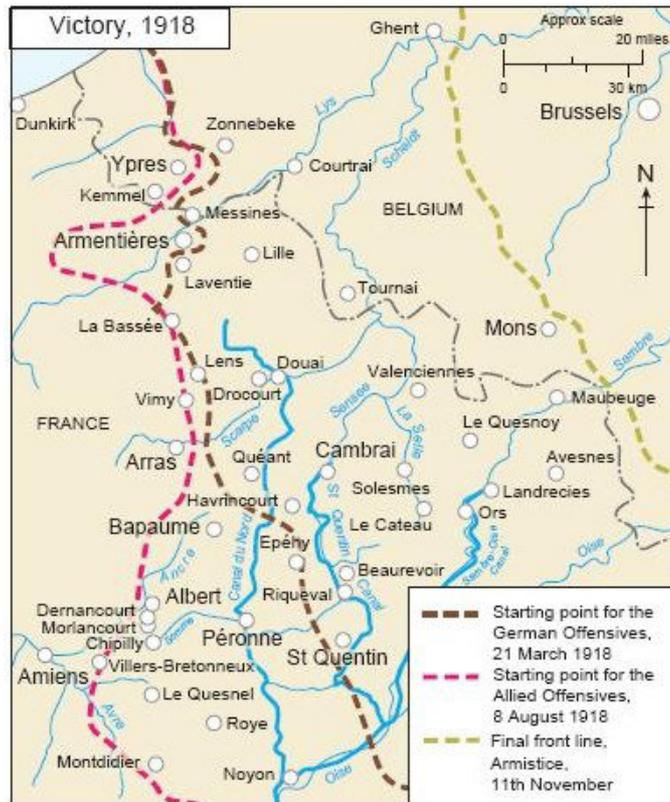
For the Allies, the beginning of 1918 was very different to previous years. In earlier years, they had been the ones who had planned the major offensives for the year in the hope there would be a breakthrough and advance to victory. 1917 had seen the defeat of the Russians, the French army reduced to a secondary role and the British had been fought to an exhausting standstill in the morass of Passchendaele, not even the brief 'victory' at Cambrai at the end of the year could be thought of as a decisive action. The declaration of war by the USA back in April 1917 had not resulted in masses of fresh troops – it would not be until July 1918, that their presence would finally be felt.

The Allies realised that the release of over 1 million battle-hardened German troops from the Eastern front to the Western front, could only mean one thing – a major German offensive, aimed to destroy the British and French armies, before the arrival of large quantities of US troops could make a difference. The only question would be where and when the German hammer-blow would fall. For the first time, the British army in the field set itself up for defence. In Flanders, the British withdrew and gave up every yard of ground gained at Third Ypres and more yet, almost to the very gates of Ypres itself. The losses and heartbreak of Passchendaele had been for nothing.

The uncertainty for the British generals was not helped by the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, taking a hand and deliberately putting a hold of the sending of further troops to France so as to prevent Haig launching another costly offensive. Haig had not been planning an offensive for 1918 at this stage; there was a veritable German hurricane to withstand first. It is rarely realised by most people today just how close the Allies were to come to losing the war in 1918 due to this intervention by the Prime Minister. At least when the crisis did come, Lloyd George ensured such troops were released – but almost too late.

Tactics on the battlefield too had changed since the rigid three-trench system of 1915-1917. The trenches were still there, but now there were 'zones'. The front zone was only lightly held, sufficiently only to provide resistance and allow reserves to be brought forward to join the troops already holding the 'battle zone'. It would be here, with the attacking troops being drawn in, that the enemy would be destroyed – but the key here was that the attacking troops would have to be 'held up long enough' in the front zone. The British troops too were now different; differentiation between regular/territorial/Kitchener/conscripts were gone, officers were now selected from 'other ranks' who had proved themselves, not just those from good families or schools. Soldiers too were now well trained in a variety of specialisms, Lewis guns, bombing, sniping etc. and they were trained to work together in coordination. Everything was set, as best it could be for the onslaught...

...The Germans had learned lessons too. Gone now would be the all-out attack on a strongly held position with resulting failure and high casualties. Instead they would use 'Storm troopers', specialists to infiltrate weaker areas, cut off and isolate stronger points but maintain the advance. In this way strong-points could be dealt with later when they had been completely isolated.



Extent of the German advance in the British Zone Spring 1918

With only hours warning from intelligence sources for the British, the first German hammer blow fell on March 21st 1918 (operation Michael). The Germans picked the most exposed part of the British line, where it joined the French, on the Somme. Here too were some of the weaker troops. Preceded by a massive but short artillery bombardment, mustard gas launched in rear areas to silence artillery and prevent reinforcement troops moving and a very convenient morning mist – the Germans attacked. The Storm troopers broke through immediately, confusion reigned in the British lines, the Forward Zone could not stop masses of German troops breaking through and thus not allow time for reserves to be brought up into the Battle zone. The breakthrough expanded rapidly both in breadth and depth. The German objective was to split the British and French armies and take the city of Amiens. Capture of Amiens, would mean the loss of the main British railhead in this part of the Western front, and force a general retreat back towards the Channel ports. Defeat for the Allies would surely follow.



The German Spring Offensive 1918, the Germans attack...

Day by day the British were forced back, not in yards but in miles. The gains on the Somme battlefield of 1916 were lost in a single day. Disaster for the Allies looked inevitable. Although the German advance could not seem to be stopped, it was being slowed down. The Germans threw every available man into attacks in situations where speed mattered more than casualties – this was a serious mistake, these troops simply could not be replaced. The amount of allied stores that fell into the hands of the advancing Germans, starved of food for three years, also slowed them down and served to demoralise them as they realised just how much greater the Allied resources were. Finally, carefully staged British counter-attacks in key locations also served to help stop the Germans.



...a Scene behind the Allied lines, Spring 1918

Within sight of Amiens cathedral, the Germans were finally halted – the Allied lines finally held. Frustrated, the Germans could only count their casualties realise their overstretched lines of communication and start a new offensive elsewhere. The next would come further north toward the city of Arras and another south of Ypres. The pattern would be the same – an immediate initial breakthrough with a rapid advance only to be later held by the Allies. Each attack and advance costing more and more troops, troops the Germans could no longer replace.

. The 1st Hampshire had been holding the line East of Arras at the start of the German offensive on the Somme on 21/3/18. As the German attack spread northwards, the 1st Hampshire withstood a major attack near Wancourt on 28/3/18 and held them. Actions here were pivotal in preventing this German attack spreading further northwards. In April 1918 things were in fact to stabilise in this area. So much so, that the 1st Hampshire were moved northwards to stem the second German offensive (operation Georgette) south of Ypres that had begun on 9/11/18. By 24/4/18, the 1st Hampshire was able to make an attack of their own in Pacaut Wood approximately 4 miles north-west of Bethune.

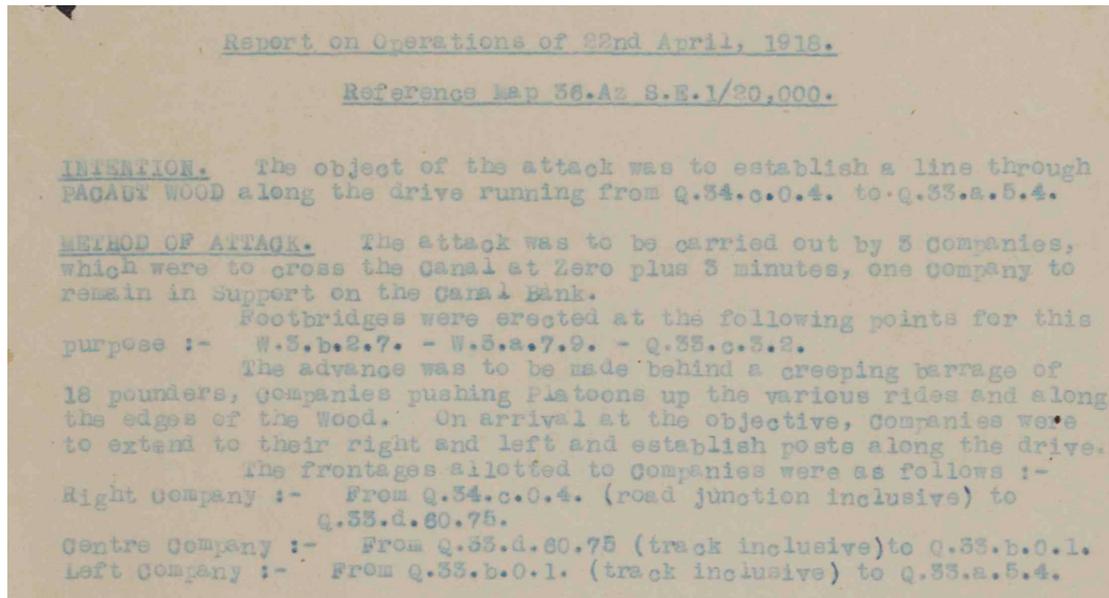


Trench map showing the captured line in Pacaut Wood

Their war diary:

20/4/18.	Good deal of heavy shelling along the CANAL Bank during the morning. During the night "C" Company pushed 3 Platoons across the CANAL and occupied the southern edge of BOIS DE PACAUT. Two wounded prisoners of the 471st Regiment captured.
21/4/18.	Canal bank intermittently shelled throughout the day and occasional shelling at night.
22/4/18.	The Battalion carried out an attack against the BOIS DE PACAUT. See separate report on the operations.
23/4/18.	Intermittent shelling of CANAL BANK. Relieved by 1st Somersets and 2nd Duke of Wellingtons, and on relief proceeded to LANNY.
24/4/18.	Day spent in resting.
25/4/18.	Day spent in cleaning up.

The report on the 1st Hampshire attack, mentioned in the diary entry of 22/4/18 has survived and provided a very detailed account of this attack:



The plan for the attack shows this was to be made by all four companies of the battalion, the objective being a 'drive' through the middle of Pacaut Wood.



One of the 'Drives' in Pacaut Wood today

ASSEMBLY AND ADVANCE. By 5 a.m. the Company holding the Southern edge of PACAUT WOOD had been withdrawn to the South Bank of the Canal, and the Battalion was disposed with companies opposite the bridges by which they were to cross the canal. The Support Company was between W.3.b.3.7. and Q.33.c.4.3. with a Lewis Gun Section opposite each bridgehead.

At 5'15 a.m. - Zero Hour - our heavy barrage opened on the wood, with a heavy Trench Mortar Barrage on the Southern edge of the Wood. The enemy S.O.S. -single Red lights - was sent up at once.

At 5'18 a.m. our troops commenced to cross the canal, and the enemy barrage fell along the line of the Canal. It was especially heavy by the centre bridge and a few casualties were incurred before all the assaulting troops had managed to get across.

The Right and Centre Companies came under machine gun fire from the wood almost at once, but the left met with no opposition. The right Company, who were being held up by machine gun fire when nearing their objective, was successful in stopping some of this fire by pushing out Lewis Guns in front to cover the advance of the remainder.

The attack had started according to plan with three companies advancing across the canal following a 3-minute barrage of the enemy positions. It would be inevitable that given the few crossing places, any enemy counter barrage might be expected to be concentrated on such locations.

By 5'35 a.m. the left Company was on its objective, and by 5'40 a.m. the two right platoons of the right Company were on their objective. The centre Company had suffered heavily in Officers and N.C.O.'s. were held up for a little time, but they eventually managed to push up the main drive to Q.33.a.9.2. where they were in touch with the left Company. As the enemy were still holding the wood about Q.33.d.2.9., the centre Company forced up in the main drive facing

East. In the meantime, the right company extended to its left in the hopes of getting into touch with the Centre, as there was now a considerable gap in the line.

About 9 a.m. a Platoon of the Support company was ordered to proceed up the drive from Q.33.c.8.0. to Q.33.d.6.9. and to extend to its right and left at the latter point in order to link up the line. At the same time, the Right and Centre Companies were ordered to work inwards. Owing to the loss of the Officer leading the Platoon up the drive from Q.33.c.8.0. it was not until 10'50 a.m. that this platoon was able to make good the cross roads at Q.33.d.6.9.

Losses to the centre company of the attack meant that the reserve company was now sent forward to assist.

About 11 a.m. the machine gun fire in the wood, which had been heavy all the morning, began to decrease, and the snelling on the CANAL BANK increased.

At 1'30 p.m., Lieut. Colonel F.A.W. Armitage, D.S.O., commanding the Battalion, was killed.

At 3 p.m. it was reported that the whole line was connected up.

At about 3 p.m. the centre Company had established a line joining up the Flank Companies. The noise caused by this movement through the wood had, however, alarmed the enemy, who opened rifle and machine gun fire and sent up the S.O.S. A heavy barrage was at once put down on the wood and continued till about 5'15 p.m.

During this time the Centre Company lost touch with the flanks. They, however, reorganised and again attempted by working through the undergrowth to establish posts just South of the LA PANNERIE - RISE DU VILAGE road.

After almost 10 hours of fighting, the 1st Hampshire had reached and almost captured the planned objective. The fighting would continue:

The battalion line was at length entirely connected up by 12'45 a.m. on the 23rd instant, the centre portion consisting of posts 18 yards apart about 25 yards South of the Drive. This was, however, not reported until about 11 a.m. on the 23rd. As soon as it was ascertained that the Centre was short of the objective, a party of 18 men was organised from the support company, who had sustained heavy casualties on the CANAL BANK. These were ordered to establish posts on the drive, and it was hoped to be able to advance the existing line up to the same points. It was inadvisable to draw more than 12 men from the Support Company, as this would have endangered the CANAL BANK in case of a hostile attack.

At 5'45 a.m. it was reported that these posts had been established, but later information showed that they were still short of the objective. The enemy shortly afterwards displayed great activity along the fronts in the wood with bombs and machine guns.

An attack was made on the posts at Q.33.d.9.4., but it was repulsed. In view of the impending relief, it was considered inadvisable to make another attempt that night.

The fighting had now lasted for a full 24 hours. The men of the 1st Hampshire would have been exhausted. Any further attempts would have to be left to a relieving battalion.

During the operation several machine guns and about 50 prisoners were taken. 15 machine guns were brought back. The Battalion casualties were 8 Officers and about 200 Other Ranks.

The cost of the operation...

It is known that George Hallett died of his wounds on 25/4/1918. The following table from the war diary provides a table of Other Rank Casualties for the 1st Hampshire for the month of April 1918:

Resume of casualties during April.

Other Ranks.

Date.	Killed.	Died of Wounds.	Wounded.	Wounded remained at duty.	Gassed.	Missing.	Total.
4/4/18.	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
5/4/18.	1	-	1	-	1	-	3
6/4/18.	-	1	3	-	-	-	4
7/4/18.	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
8/4/18.	-	-	5	-	-	-	5
10/4/18.	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
13/4/18.	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
14/4/18.	1	-	3	-	-	-	4
15/4/18.	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
16/4/18.	1	-	-	-	1	-	2
19/4/18.	6	-	21	-	-	-	27
20/4/18.	3	-	12	-	-	1	15
21/4/18.	5	-	-	-	-	-	5
22/4/18.	22	1	147	8	-	20	198
23/4/18.	1	4	11	2	-	-	18
24/4/18.	-	-	2	1	-	-	3
27/4/18.	-	1	4	-	-	-	5
28/4/18.	2	-	8	3	-	1	14
29/4/18.	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
T O T A L	43	7	222	14	3	21	310



Satellite image of Pacalt Wood today – private land, the ‘Drives’ are still clearly visible



Site of the advance of the 1st Hampshire 22/4/18, canal on the left, Pacalt Wood on the right

From this it would seem most probable that George Hallett had been one of those wounded in the attack on Pacalt Wood on 22/4/1918 and had died of his wounds three days later. Today he is buried at:

LAPUGNOY MILITARY CEMETERY, France, VII. E. 32

LAPUGNOY MILITARY CEMETERY



Location Information

Lapugnoy is a village 6 kilometres west of Bethune.

Historical Information

The first burials were made in Plot I of the cemetery in September 1915, but it was most heavily used during the Battle of Arras, which began in April 1917. The dead were brought to the cemetery from casualty clearing stations, chiefly the 18th and the 23rd at Lapugnoy and Lozinghem, but between May and August 1918 the cemetery was used by fighting units.

Lapugnoy Military Cemetery contains 1,324 Commonwealth burials of the First World War, 3 being unidentified, and 11 from the Second World War, all dating from May 1940.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens.



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C. HALLETT
HAMPSHIRE REGIMENT
25TH APRIL 1918